Forest Service News Release

Contact: Nikki Maxwell
Public Affairs Officer
National Forests in Florida
(850) 830-7984
nikki.maxwell@usda.gov

Alexander Springs 'Swim Area' Temporarily Closed due to Aggressive Alligator

Incident Under Investigation, Public Safety Remains USFS Top Priority

Ocala, FL (July *17, 2023*) — In response to an aggressive alligator incident today, National Forests in Florida (NFF) has temporarily closed the Alexander Springs swim area, effective immediately. The 7 ½ foot-long alligator believed to be involved in the incident was removed this afternoon and the swim area is expected to reopen in the near future.

At approximately 12:30 p.m. today, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) was notified of an incident involving an adult male visitor and an aggressive alligator at the Alexander Springs Recreation Area on the Ocala National Forest (ONF). The man was snorkeling within the springs' designated swim area, where he reports being bitten by an adult alligator.

The victim suffered puncture wounds and lacerations. Adventure Ocala, the concessioner permitted by the USFS to operate Alexander Springs, responded quickly and appropriately, rendering aid to the victim, clearing all guests from the swim area, and closing it for public safety. The victim chose to transport himself to seek medical care.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) managed the removal of the aggressive alligator shortly after being notified and is investigating the incident. The USFS will reopen the Alexander Springs swim area once FWC completes their investigation of the area and recommends next steps for public safety. For more about this process, contact Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission | FWC (myfwc.com).

Temporary closures of recreation areas become necessary for various public safety reasons, including aggressive wildlife encounters, prescribed burns and destructive weather. Alexander Springs was briefly closed earlier this month for the removal of a different alligator, however, no prior alligator incidents this year (on ONF) involved any injuries to the public. The USFS and FWC will continue to monitor conditions and remove alligators as necessary.

For more about National Forests in Florida, visit National Forests in Florida - Home (usda.gov), and www.adventureocala.com and follow www.Facebook.com/NationalForestsinFlorida

IMPORTANT NOTES:

July is alligator nesting season in Florida: Alligator mothers are very alert and protective of their eggs and young. All reptiles are more active and need to eat more during this hot season. Please use caution, in and around water (including on shoreline). Follow all posted and prescribed safety guidance. Alligators are masters of camouflage, blending seamlessly into their natural environment. They are not easily detected underwater, no matter how clear the water may appear, and are very territorial, particularly during this time of year.

Wildlife Health and Safety Tip: All birds, amphibians and reptiles carry natural bacteria which poses dangerous health risks to humans (mammals) upon contact. Use good sanitary practices in the forest and seek medical attention immediately if you have any incidents with wildlife causing open wounds. You may feel fine initially, however, professional medical care may be necessary to prevent illness, by fully cleaning and treating the wound.

About Alexander Springs Recreation Area: Only 27 first-magnitude springs exist in Florida, and Alexander Springs is by far one of the easiest to enjoy. A broad and naturally gently sloped spring pool is a constant 72°F and extraordinarily clear. Ripples play across the sand bottom as small fish dart about. Surrounded by a floodplain forest of maples, sweetgum and cabbage palms, this recreation area feels almost tropical. For more, visit National Forests in Florida - Alexander Springs Recreation Area (usda.gov)

#